LOVETT

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AMULETS

AND MASCOTS.

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ENGLISH CHARMS, AMULETS AND MASCOTS.

[By EDWARD LOVETT.]

In these days of "Advanced Education" and Science, it is decidedly interesting to note the strong revival that has taken place in the use of Mascots, not only for motor-cars and other up-to-date locomotive appliances, but for undertakings of travel and sport, to say nothing of the ordinary avocations of every-day life. The use of such Mascots is avowedly to assist in bringing about the desires of the wearer, or to ward off all that may be hurtful or unfortunate. True! there are many who laugh at the whole thing, or say that it is only "done for fun," but a practice so widely distributed is not "done for fun," and the fact that a great many people are now carrying these Mascots secretly, shows that they undoubtedly believe that at any rate there may be "something in it"!

These Modern Mascots are mostly quite meaningless in their form, consisting as they do of such things as various doll figures, grotesque models of dogs, Teddie-bears and Kittens.

Now there is not much to wonder at in this revival, much less to laugh at!

We cannot expect that a few generations of "Education" will eradicate the impressions which long past ages have fixed upon the primitive mind.

If superstition means ignorance, then we should naturally be superstitious, for we have learned but little yet.

Now, alongside this modern belief in Mascots—which, by the way, is practically confined to the monied, and therefore "educated" classes—there exists amongst the peasants of this country, as also it does in other countries, a belief in the old world amulets, charms and cures which can be traced back in some instances even to the

pre-historic period. These old beliefs are, unlike the modern Mascot, founded upon the reasonable basis, if I may use the term, of logical symbolism. For example, an object regarded as a thunderbolt is believed to be a safeguard against lightning. The digging-foot of a mole (with its cramped appearance) is thought to be a cure for cramp.

The teeth and claws of wild animals are carried to protect the wearer from such animals, and the tooth of a dead man, hung round the neck of an infant, is so put there to assist in the operation of "cutting the teeth."

For some years I have been making notes and collecting specimens of these curious objects, the belief in which is still strong; and which have come down to us from such remote times. Of course, it is no easy task. To begin with there is a marked objection on the part of those who believe in these things, to exhibit them or discuss them, or even to admit that they know anything whatever about them.

When one appreciates fully what these superstitions really meant in the days when they were, so to speak, in "full swing," we can understand how such reluctance comes about. In short, it may be summed up in one well-known phrase, "Talk of the Devil and he's sure to appear."

I have had many curious experiences of this fear. On two occasions in Italy I freely mentioned the Evil Eye superstition to shop-keepers who were actually selling "charms," and in both cases they became in a state of genuine terror and begged me to be silent.

In Devonshire, as elsewhere, questions relating to that which is taboo, are put in the form of a negative in order, so to speak, to get safely round the objectionable subject, whilst sailors persistently call, by an understood nickname, that which is unmentionable by its proper one.

To admire or praise a baby is to do it a life-long injury if not worse, but you may convey your thoughts diplomatically and all is well.

On the other hand there are many converts, those who have "grown out" of the old beliefs, and these are always ready and willing to help the collector. Curiously enough, too, I have often found that old discarded charms and amulets may still be found in cottages, put away in old drawers or cupboards. Once I got a splendid example of a Hag-stone from Lancashire, which at one time was powerful magic, but had degenerated into a weight to keep a door open. Think, what a find this would have been for a motorist. I have found that with tact and plenty of patience I have succeeded very well with more than one individual actually engaged in selling "cures" to-day, by "accidentally" producing two or three charms from my own pocket and showing a strong sympathy in regard to their curative powers. On the other hand, should suspicion be suddenly roused, silence follows, and no amount of persuasive eloquence will extract any further information.

One of the simplest objects of superstition, and one that is a good one to begin with in a country talk with a peasant, is a "Thunderbolt." These are considered to be formed whenever a flash of lightning "strikes the ground," and when found, are regarded by the peasants as being efficacious in protecting houses or individuals from lightning in future. This is a typical example of what we may term Homœopathic Magic!

Now I find that there are two distinct types of "Thunderbolt." The one is a piece of metal that has the appearance of being fused, and includes nodules of iron pyrites so frequently found in the chalk, London clay and other formations, whilst the other type consists of various pointed or sharp objects such as the pointed fossil bones, called Belemnites, of a cephalopod, and the polished axes and chipped arrow heads of the Neolithic period. Now it is a curious fact that in localities where the Belemnites are not found, the people not only do not regard them as thunderbolts, but ignore

them as being "nothing." This rule also applies to celts and arrow heads.

Indeed, I know places in England where "Thunderbolts," as tangible objects, are quite unknown, whereas in the North of Ireland, where polished diorite celts are often turned out of the ground, there was a time when every cottage kept one on the rafter as a safeguard against lightning.

In South Devon I found that models of acorns (not real ones) carried in the pocket are supposed to be a protection during thunder storms, and this because the oak tree is particularly liable to be struck. I heard of other amulets against lightning in Devonshire, but none of them were called "Thunderbolts," whilst at Lyme Regis, so near, the Belemnites of the Lias are hardly ever called by any other name but "Thunderbolts."

Another very widely distributed charm is the "Holey Stone," a stone, usually flint, having a natural perforation. In Antrim such stones are tied to the horns of cows to prevent the Pixies from stealing the milk. In Lancashire and Yorkshire similar stones were hung up inside the house door as a safeguard against witches. Similar customs prevailed in Devonshire, whilst in Somersetshire holey stones were suspended in fruit trees to protect the fruit from Pixies. I found perforated stones used as Evil Eye charms in many parts of Italy, whereas in France, Germany and Belgium this superstition is not at all general.

There is, perhaps, no more remarkable type of charm than the Heart, and the reason is obvious. At one time a real heart of a sheep or cow, in which pins and nails were inserted, was used in black magic.

I am indebted to my old friend, Mr. H. C. Collyer, for the following fine bit of Devonshire Folk Lore: "Once upon a time"—in reality about fifty years ago—there existed in a South Devon village, two "Black Witches" named Paddy Goselin and Mary Ann Pyecraft. A certain farmer incurred

the anger of Paddy Goselin by pressing for payment of some money he owed. In revenge Paddy Goselin said he would put a spell on the farmer's cattle. Seven bullocks went mad and four died in great agony with their tongues lolling out. (Probably Paddy Goselin gave them yew branches to eat, which would have that effect.) The farmer sent to a white witch in a neighbouring village (named Mother Sunshine). She told him to take the heart of one of the dead bullocks, stick it full of pins and nails and hang it up in the kitchen chimney, and he did so. The still living bullocks quite recovered, and no other cattle suffered. My friend, Mr. Collyer, knew the man who acted for the farmer, and got him to prepare a heart exactly as used by Mother Sunshine.

Now this Heart Magic is of very wide distribution, and exists in many forms. Even now sailors upon starting on a voyage have given to them for luck, heart-shaped pin cushions, stuck full of beaded pins in fancy designs. This is a survival of the use of hearts as charms against demons, for it was formerly believed that tempests and storms were caused by demons. Small heart-shaped stones are still much worn, and the horse brasses of this form are not only very numerous but very generously distributed. The Heart Charm is a great favourite in Croydon.

I do not intend referring in this paper to Horse Charms generally, but it is a curious fact that the Anchor pattern is usually associated with horses working in coast towns, and I have also found sailors carrying a small model anchor as a charm against being drowned. Now, the anchor is the symbol of St. Nicholas, and he is the patron saint of children and sailors.

Another charm against drowning, carried by the sailors of South Devon, is the "Merry Thought" bone of a fowl, whereas in Yorkshire I found the small T shaped bone from a sheep's head carried for the same reason. It is a frequent custom in Devonshire to

give a sailor a bit of Sea-worn Coal (it must be *given*) for good luck. Exactly the same idea exists on the coast of Kent, and I have many records from inland places of coal being carried for good luck. Pliny and other early writers speak of the curative powers of jet, so in all probability the carrying of a bit of coal is a survival of this belief. It is also interesting to find such importance attached to sea-worn coal. In fact, there is "magic" in that which the sea yields. The fishermen of the Norfolk coast frequently find rounded bits of amber and carry such as a cure for rheumatism. Sea shells have a great record in witchcraft, and to-day there are many coast-towns and villages where shell necklets of some old and recognised design are still made and actually described by the fisher folk as being for "luck." Such beliefs may be traced all over the littorals of the world.

As regards sailors, the Child's Caul is, of course, well known, but its value has gone down. At one time they changed hands at about £7 each, but now they have scarcely any value except for a museum.

As might be expected, toothache has many charm cures. On the South Downs I found that certain buds of the thistle carried in the pocket were considered beneficial, whilst in Norfolk the feet of moles, not in a bag, were used. In Devonshire certain water-worn pieces of limestone having a vein of quartz, thus resembling a molar tooth, are carried as a remedy for toothache, and it is remarkable that an exactly similar stone is used for the same purpose by some of the Belgian peasants, who call such stones the "Teeth of Saint Apollonia." She was a Saint of Alexandria, and suffered martyrdom after having all her teeth drawn out.

The ailments of children naturally receive much attention in the way of charm remedies. The tooth of a dead man—a somewhat difficult thing to get except in the case of the discovery of early human burials, such as Roman or Saxon for example, and these

have actually often supplied the desired object—suspended round the neck of an infant under the clothing, is powerful magic against convulsions caused by teething. In certain parts of Devonshire a small dried body of a frog in a tiny silk bag is similarly worn by children as a charm against fits. Another "cure" for fits consists of small split twigs of the "Male Ash" also carried in little silk bags. This is very interesting in view of the ancient belief of the descent of the human race from a tree, which was rather generally supposed to have been the ash. The Devonshire use of the word "male" is also applied to other charm objects, for I found the skull of a "Male Cat" with a bundle of pins inserted in the base, hung up in a cottage as against witches. And in another I found a dried toad tied up in rag and hung up inside a door, also against witches. This was called a "Male Frog." Upon further investigation, however, I find that in many places the toad is regarded as the male of the frog.

In other counties I could find no trace of a belief in the charm power of toads and frogs. That "old-fashioned" trouble cramp has quite an interesting set of "cures." Near the mouth of the Medway I found that certain fossil teeth found in the London clay formation were considered to be a good cure. In some parts of Sussex the digging fore-foot of a mole, carried in a small silk bag, is a "good remedy." In other parts of Sussex the small knots on the bark of the ash tree are "cures," and are known as "Cramp Nuts," whilst in my own county (Surrey), the Holly is said to be a cure for cramp.

Rheumatism has many "cures," the most general and, of course, the most modern, is a Potato carried in the pocket. Besides this, however, I have found the Astragalus, or knuckle-bone of the sheep, so carried. In other parts of the country the foot bones of the pig are used, and certain water-worn stones. I have already referred to the use of amber, but all these remedies are ap-

parently illogical. Possibly the original "cure "has been lost. The cures for warts are interesting, and generally well known, but I will record two. In Gloucestershire and in Derbyshire, a small twig of elder wood was obtained; in this was cut notches corresponding in number to the warts; touching each wart with the knife before making the notch. When the tally is finished, it must be thrown where it cannot be found. In Devonshire I found an old woman who cured warts by rubbing them with a piece of lumpy water-worn quartzite, very much resembling in form and colour a huge wart. This was quite interesting.

Talking of holly reminds me that a curious superstition exists as regards Drovers' Whips. In Devonshire the whip handles must be holly, whilst in Somersetshire they must be hazel, and on no account of holly. Pliny states that if a staff of holly be thrown after an animal it will subdue it even if it does not touch it. Hence, doubtless, the surviving belief in the holly for whips. The hazel has powers of another kind. It is used for Divining Rods, and I have two specimens that have "found water," by the greatest "water finder" of the last fifty years.

In Belgium and in the Pyrenees the favourite wood for drovers' whips is that of the Medlar: Fr. Nefler. Due, no doubt, to some local legend.

The holly is a very interesting tree. In some places it is planted near houses as a safeguard against lightning, and the ancient Romans used to send holly wreaths as a symbol of congratulation on the occasion of weddings. To-day in South Devon the curious lines of markings on the bark of holly trees are called Pixies' Love Letters.

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